

January 20, 1955

Dear Bernie:

Thank you for your letters. I am thinking very seriously about the Detroit meeting, but haven't decided whether I should go. I am at somewhat of a loss to know exactly what I could contribute; if general curmudgeonry were all that were expected, I might manage, but not much more. I will have decided one way or another during the next day or two.

Your suggestion in re Plumb is excellent. In fact, he is rather on my mind right now. In the last report of the A.C.L.U. (of which I trust you are a member—if not, let me persuade you sometime) at page 39, Malin made some misguided remark about "reputable American biologists indicate that the evidence of the research laboratory demands further consideration of the Lysenko theory." That this is false is little enough reason to fire a misguided chemist, but I was surprised enough that the ACLU would dabble in this field that I wrote to Malin about it. I had an intuition that he had gotten this from Plumb himself in that article of June 10. The reply, from Malin's research director, admitted that this was in fact so. Rather belatedly, they now say that the ACLU does not want "to get into a technical controversy on genetic theory". So, they sent a copy of my letter to Plumb, asking that he make a statement to ACLU (if he wished) that might be forwarded to me.

In my letter to Malin, I did not mention Plumb by name, but referred to his article as an outstanding example of the way in which research on adaptation has been distorted. I emphasized that Lysenkism was a repudiation of the chromosome theory, that is the letter followed very much the tone of our joint project without going very far into the matter of that particular news story.

I should not want Plumb to imagine that we had not considered a direct approach in criticizing his article, to him or to the Times, and for this reason I think it would be quite timely for you to write him as you suggest. It might be most straightforward if you sent him the unexpurgated final version (with the "paragraph 5") which would support the explanation of why we did not manage to complete our joint project in time. This is only a suggestion, and any way you decide to present the matter to him is OK.

I am beginning to conclude that Plumb has a fixed bias on this question of hereditary adaptation: in last Sunday's Times (Magazine) he gave an ambiguous account of DDT-resistance in mosquitoes, for which James Crow here (who has been studying the problem closely) cannot imagine the scientific sources. He has just written Plumb, not critically, but just asking for reference to the research that "indicates that ~~Flies~~ Flies, for example, develop gradually the ability to synthesize an enzyme that breaks up DDT." If this slant continues, perhaps we will think about reviving our "letter to the ~~editor~~ editor", that is if time weighs heavy on our hands.

Yours sincerely,

